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Whatever Happened to Arms Control?

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Cooperative Threat Reduction, Missile Defense, and the Nuclear Future. By Michael Krepon. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002. 304 pp., $59.95 (ISBN:0-312-29556-1).

Russian–US arms control, the strategic nuclear balance between Russia and the United States and, to a lesser extent, US deployment of theater and national missile defenses have in recent years dropped off the list of important issues for international diplomacy. This shift has not occurred because those who champion arms control are misguided, or because nuclear weapons are no longer unimaginably destructive. Nor does it reflect a judgment that arms control failed during the Cold War, or that missile defenses produce only positive results. Instead, this change in focus reflects the facts that the Cold War has been over for more than a decade and that the security threats and agendas that once dominated foreign and defense policy have been replaced by the war on terrorism, the need to deal with the general spread of chemical, biological, and nuclear weapons, and a growing realization that Islam is being used by the kleptocracies of the Middle East to hide totalitarianism, poverty, and hate. Under these circumstances, it is not clear how arms control with Russia, a junior member of NATO through its participation in the Partnership for Peace Program, would have much impact on anyone's security.

In *Cooperative Threat Reduction, Missile Defense, and the Nuclear Future* (a veritable tour of the global nuclear landscape), Michael Krepon addresses the changing strategic and political developments that have placed arms control on the back burner of international diplomacy. Krepon is a major figure in the US arms control community and a champion in the fight to preserve the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty. Not surprisingly, his analysis is based on an eclectic mix of partisan commentary about the lost battle to preserve the ABM Treaty, an overview of the history and folklore of Cold War arms control, and a commentary on the problems created by the horizontal and vertical proliferation of nuclear weapons and the resulting emergence of a complicated set of nuclear relationships that now span the globe. Krepon acknowledges that the Russian–US strategic relationship no longer dominates arms control or defense policy agendas, even though at times he stridently predicts that the deployment of missile defenses will have a negative impact on several enduring rivalries.

Because partisan politics and policy advocacy have more to do with marketing than with either scholarly analysis or calm reflection, policies are rarely as awful or as beneficial as their partisan critics and advocates suggest. Thus, Krepon is at his best when he takes a step back from his role as policy advocate to explore the likely ways in which security threats will emerge over the coming decades. For example, he concludes that limited US national missile defenses would provide modest benefits (for example, provide protection from an accidental missile launch) without stirring up much trouble. He also notes, however, that if the United States builds a highly capable missile defense, improves its counterforce capabilities, and rides roughshod over the legitimate security concerns of Russian and Chinese officials, then missile defenses will damage relations with Moscow and Beijing and

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spark a serious arms race. To his credit, Krepon acknowledges that the history of US efforts to construct missile defenses suggests that we will only see modest defenses being built in the years ahead and that a general spirit of cooperation can improve relations between Washington and a nuclear-armed Russia and China. In other words, when Krepon assesses his own calculus of the risks and benefits provided by national missile defense, his analysis supports existing policy, although he would have preferred to deploy a missile defense within the context of a modified ABM Treaty.

For a book presumably directed toward the future, however, *Cooperative Threat Reduction, Missile Defense, and The Nuclear Future* appears overly focused on the past, or at least on traditional security threats. Krepon seems preoccupied with the need to somehow move the Russian–US arms control and disarmament agenda forward, even though the most troublesome threats to international security are posed by the systemic failure to stop the spread of chemical, biological, and nuclear weapons and associated delivery systems. Few oppose the Nunn-Lugar initiatives intended to decommission surplus Soviet nuclear systems, and it is difficult to see how further arms reductions will improve Russian–US relations given that concerns about the nuclear balance generate little political interest in either Moscow or Washington. Krepon champions Cooperative Threat Reduction—an amorphous mix of confidence-building measures, diplomacy, and disarmament initiatives—with China and Russia. But relations between Washington, Beijing, and Moscow have less to do with the nuclear balance than with differing political viewpoints and preferences for the future. From their Cold War peak, Russian and US leaders have reduced their deployed nuclear forces by about 80 percent; it is hard to take seriously the notion that anyone suffers sleepless nights worrying about an unconstrained arms race.

Krepon has little to say about the "axis of evil," the Bush administration's shorthand for the three dictatorships that are arming themselves with chemical, biological, and nuclear weapons. He is ambivalent about the counterproliferation war against Iraq, suggesting that disarming Saddam will only send a message to troublemakers that they should possess nuclear weapons before they confront the United States. But he fails to consider what message might be sent if the United States and the international community stood by as states armed themselves with weapons of mass destruction. Additionally, he is not all that supportive of the Bush administration's tough stand against certain countries, noting that no such thing as a good or a bad nuclear weapon exists. This is a fair point, but it ignores the more important political and practical fact that not all regimes are careful and cautious custodians of their nuclear, chemical, and biological arsenals. Even more disturbing is that sometimes these regimes are beyond the reach of reason and history, multilateral initiatives, international law, diplomacy, cooperative overtures, incentives and inducements, and the most blatant forms of coercion, preferring to defy the international community rather than participate in cooperative solutions to security issues.

Cooperative Threat Reduction, Missile Defense, and the Nuclear Future offers important insights into the theoretical and policy preferences of those who advocate disarmament, cooperation, and diplomacy as the best ways to address today's most challenging security threats. It also provides insights into how the historical record and dominant theories of arms control and deterrence are viewed by a leading disarmament advocate. This is a narrative that has been recently overwhelmed by the vision of history and theory articulated by Krepon's more hawkish colleagues (see, for example, Joseph 2001; Payne 2001). Yet, the fundamental question facing disarmament and arms control advocates remains unanswered in *Cooperative Threat Reduction, Missile Defense, and the Nuclear Future*: How can cooperative measures address the hard cases of proliferation that face the international community today?

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